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# SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE BIBLE IN BOHEMIA.

BY G. W. MALIN.

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*In Manuscript.*

The antiquity of a Bohemian version of the Scriptures is generally conceded, although it has been the subject of earnest controversy.

Dobrowsky, a learned Bohemian, writing in 1780,\* not having met with very early MSS., doubted their existence, and thought it probable that the first translation had been made under the auspices of King Wenzel the First, who died in the year 1307. But P. Gelasius Dobner† (1788) assures us that he had seen and examined MSS. of an earlier date; and that the Emperor Charles IV, as King of Bohemia, in a charter issued in 1347, ascribed the Bohemian version to St. Jerome in these words, viz.: “Ob reverentiam & memoriam gloriosissimi Confessoris beati Jeronymi Stridonienſis Doctoris egregii & translatoris, interpretique eximii Sacræ Scripturæ de ebraica in latinam & slavonicam linguas, de qua siquidem slavonica lingua nostri Regni Bohemiæ idioma sumsit exordium primordialiter & processit,” etc.‡ Balbinus§ (1677) also contends for this origin of the Bohemian version. Dobner, after a careful examination of the evidence, arrives at the conclusion that the version thus attributed to St. Jerome was originally the work of Cyril and Methodius, Greek missionaries, who first

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\* Dobrowsky, in *Abhandlungen einer Privatgesellschaft in Böhmen*, 5ter Band.

† Dobner, in *Abhandlungen der böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften in Prag*. 4ter Band, page 296.

‡ Dobner, in the same, page 298, quoting from Pelzel's *Leben Karl des Vierten*, erster Theil, in *Urkundenbuch*, S. 92.

§ Balbinus, in *Dissertatione Apologetica pro lingua Slavonica, præcipue Bohemica*.

proclaimed the Gospel to the Slavonians about the year 860, but that their translation having become archaic, as several centuries had materially modified the language of the Bohemians, was revised, modernized and assimilated to the Latin Vulgate, and afterwards generally ascribed to St. Jerome, the more readily as that distinguished man was commonly, although erroneously, claimed as a fellow-countryman by Slavonic writers.

It is evident, therefore, that those who have attributed the Bohemian translation to John Huss\* were mistaken, as it existed long before his day. It is, however, by no means improbable that by Huss, or under his supervision, it was revised, transcribed and circulated. We know at least that copies were numerous in after years among his followers. Some of these manuscripts still exist. The library of the Vatican contains a Codex Biblia Bohemica; another, of the New Testament only, is preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford,† and others are doubtless extant.

#### *The Printed Bible.*

In regard to the printed Bible, our knowledge is much more definite.

We learn from the historian Gindely‡ that the first Bohemian printing press was established by the Roman Catholics at Pilsen, in the year 1468; and that about twenty years later other presses were set up in Prague and Kuttenberg by the Ultraquist, or Calixtine party, then dominant in those cities. And from these latter, as we are informed by Elsner§ and Kleich,|| issued the two first Bohemian Bibles. The earliest of these was printed at Prague. Its typography is rude, the characters Gothic, the initial letters of the chapters are all supplied by the pen. It has no division into verses, has neither the page nor folio numbered, and is without custos. It is comprised in 610 folios, with two columns upon the page. Its colophon as translated by Kleich, is in these words, viz.:

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\* Rieger, *Die Alten und Neuen Böhmisches Brüder*, Erster Band, page 457. Züllichau, 1739.

† De Long, *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Paris, 1700.

‡ Gindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, Erster Band, page 134. Prag, 1857.

§ Elsner, *Versuch einer böhmischen Bibel-Geschichte*, von Johann Theophilus Elsner, Senior der B. Br. Unität in Gros-Pohlen, &c. Halle. 1765.

|| Kleich (Wenzel) *Vorrede zu einem böhmischen Neuen Testamente*. Zittau, 1720.

“Das Ende dieser Arbeit und Bücher des göttlichen Gesetzes ist glücklich gemacht worden in der berühmten Altstadt Prag, wobey viele Mühe und Unkosten gehabt haben die berühmten Männer und Bürger, Herr Johann Pytlik und Herr Severin, ein Kramer, Schöppen [sheriffs, or presiding magistrates,] dieses Jahrs; wie auch Herr Johann aus den Störchen, und Herr Matthias aus dem Weissen Löwen [probably noted hotels in Prague] indem sie zuvörderst ihr Absehen auf Gottes Ehre und denn auch auf das wahre Beste des Königreichs Böhmen, und den Anwachs im Guten der Böhmen und Mähren gehabt haben. Sie haben sich dabey der Hülfe der pragischen Magister und anderer im Gesetze des Herrn erfahrenen Männer bedienet, bis sie diese Arbeit zu Ende gebracht haben, und zwar im Jahr 1488, in Monat August.”

The Bible thus published in this stronghold of the Calixtines, under the auspices of the authorities of the city and partly at their expense, cannot with any show of reason, be attributed to the Brethren, by whom indeed it never appears to have been claimed, but can only be regarded as a highly praiseworthy work of the Utraquists of Prague.

This edition is now very rare. Among existing copies the best known are those in the Imperial Library at Paris\* and the State Library of Prague.†

Copies of the edition printed at Kuttenberg by Martin Von Tischniowa, in 1489, are even less frequently met with than those of that of Prague; from which however they differ in no material particular. Both editions follow closely the Latin Vulgate, and have the prefixes of St. Jerome. In both, as also in the English version by Wickliffe, the Acts of the Apostles follow the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The third Bohemian Bible was printed at Venice in 1506.‡ Why so distant a place was selected for the purpose is now unknown. It is true that Venice had established a reputation for superior typography, but by this time printing was well established in Bohemia, and even the Brethren had a press in Jungbunzlau as early as the year 1500. Possibly the enemies of the truth, who about that time instigated a bitter persecution of the

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\* Brunet, *Manuel du Libraire*. Paris, 1860.

† H. A. B. in *The Moravian*, Bethlehem, 1869.

‡ Theobald, *Hussiten Krieg*, Ander Thiel, page 138. Nürnberg, 1621.

Brethren, may have induced the authorities of the day to prohibit the printing of Bibles in Bohemia. Be that as it may, this edition also appears to have had a Calixtine origin, and was printed at the expense of the citizens of Prague. Brunet, the great French bibliographer, says of it,—“*Version faite à l'usage des Hussites par Benatska*,”—an assertion which gave the writer much trouble, until after consulting many biographers and bibliographers in search for Benatska, he discovered that the word is the Bohemian name of Venice! and that Brunet, or his amanuensis, had mistaken it for the name of a printer. The real printer was Peter Lichtenstein, a native of Cologne.

This Venetian edition has frequently been described as the first Bohemian Bible, and especially by Theobald, the historian of the wars of the Hussites, 1609 and 1621; Sam. A. Weleslawina,\* publisher of a Bohemian Bible at Prague in 1613, and after them by Comenius, who probably adopted the statement of these writers without sufficient examination. Indeed it is improbable that Comenius ever saw a copy of this edition, which had not only become rare, but was superseded before his birth by the very superior translation of the Brethren from the original Greek and Hebrew. Theobald, by his own confession imperfectly acquainted with the Bohemian language,† failed to notice a passage in the preface to the Bible in question which distinctly refers to previous editions, of which it only professes this to be a revision and improvement. This is a statement which such a scholar as Comenius would scarcely have overlooked. The passage as translated by the learned Elsner reads as follows: “Diese Arbeit haben über sich genommen die vorsichtigen Männer, Johann Hlawsa, Wenzel Sowa, Burian Lasar, Bürger der Altstadt Prag so hiebey keine Kosten gespart haben,” etc. “Und obgleich die Bibel schon vorher Böhmisch abgedruckt worden ist, so sind doch hier verschiedene vorhin eingeschlichene Mängel verbessert worden.” And again in the preface to the 4th book of Ezra, “Obgleich die böhmische Bibel *chedem schon zweymal* wäre gedruckt worden, so stünde doch dieses vierte Buch Esra niemals mit da.” The editions of Prague and Kuttenberg both omit this book and are unquestionably the two referred to.

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\* Elsner, Versuch. page 22.

† Theobald. H. K. page 139.

Theobald, travelling in Bohemia about a century after the publication of the Venetian imprint,\* met with a copy in the hands of a miller, whose hospitality he enjoyed at Tausz, and unhesitatingly accepted it as the earliest Bohemian Bible. Writing afterwards of the Taborites he commends the untiring industry with which their Pastors transcribed the Scriptures for the laity "to be read in their houses," and proceeds to say, "Finally, ten years before Luther's dispute with Tetzeli, they caused an edition to be printed in Venice, as testified by the final clause copied from the exemplar met with at Tausz," viz: "Perfectum est illud opus Biblicum Venetiis in Italia, Anno Domini 1506," etc.† There is no evidence, nor any reason for supposing, that any other Bohemian Bible was ever printed in Venice; but in attributing the printing of this to the Taborites, Theobald is manifestly wrong. That warlike sect no longer existed; and with no propriety could the name be applied to their eminently peaceful successors, the Brethren.

The three editions we have been considering were followed by seven others, printed at Prague, in the years 1529, '37, '49, '56, '70, '77 and 1613, and by one at Nuremberg in 1540. All of these were translations from the Latin of St. Jerome.‡

Seventeen editions of the New Testament only, all likewise from the Vulgate, were published in various years from 1513 to 1597. Of these, 3 were printed in Nuremberg, 1 in Olmutz, 9 at Prague, 2 at Jung-Bunzlau, 1 at Pilsen, and 1 at Prestějowa.§

The Bible, and at least one of the Testaments printed at Nuremberg, together with both the Testaments of Jung-Bunzlau, and probably some of those published in Prague, were printed by or for the Brethren.|| They, however, were far from satisfied with this translation of a translation, and earnestly desired to ascend as nearly as possible to the original sources of the waters of life. The way was opened to them by Bishop Blahoslav, a man of spotless purity and great learning, who in 1564 published a New Testament translated from the original Greek, which had the

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\* The first edition of Theobald's Hussiten's Krieg was printed in 1609.

† Hussiten Krieg. A. T. page 139.

‡ Elsner.

§ Elsner.

|| Plitt, quoted by Crøger, Geschichte der Alten Brüderkirche, 1ter Bd. page 121. Gnadau, 1865. And Gindely, Geschichte der Böhm. Br., 2ter Bd. page 70.

rare merit of being a faithful exhibit of the sense of the original in the purest idiomatic Bohemian.\* This Testament was re-printed in 1568, and in 1593, with the annotations of Bishop Niemczanius, appeared as the 6th volume of the great Bible of the Brethren.

The First edition of the Brethren's Bible was printed at Kralitz in Moravia, in the castle and at the expense of the Baron John von Zerotin, a distinguished nobleman, who adhered to the Brethren.† It was published in six quarto volumes which appeared as follows, viz., The First, containing the Pentateuch, in 1579; Second, Joshua to Esther inclusive, 1580; Third, Job, Psalms and writings of Solomon, 1582; Fourth, The Prophetical Books, 1587; Fifth, The Apocrypha; and Sixth, The New Testament, in 1593, the whole enlarged and enriched by a copious and judicious commentary. Succeeding editions were printed in a more compact form, in one volume and without commentary. The Brethren's Bible was the first Bohemian one in which the chapters were divided into verses.

The Brethren prepared the way for this translation, which they had long desired, by sending a number of their most gifted youth to German and Swiss Universities, where alone a thorough knowledge of the original tongues could then be attained. From the young men thus educated eight scholars were selected to whom the task of translation was confided. Their moral fitness for the work may be inferred from the fact that four of them afterwards became Bishops of the Unity.‡ Their literary ability was never denied by the bitterest of their enemies. The work they produced is the proudest monument of the ancient Church of the Brethren. It is a faithful translation rendered in choice language. A selection of passages from this Bible was made for the use of schools and published by the Jesuits, from their press at Prague, in the year 1668. In the preface to this book its editor says, that while this Bible, as a whole, cannot be recommended to Catholics and ought not to be in their possession, on account of its heresies (*ketzerische Irrthümer*), its style is idiomatic, beautiful and pure, beyond that of

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\* Elsner, Versuch. page 79. Gindely, Gesch. der B. Br. 2ter Bd. page 70.

† Comenius, *Ratio Disciplina*. Amst, 1660. page 64 §117.

‡ Note on the 124th page of the German translation of Comenius published at Schwabach, 1739.

any other Bohemian book, and he wishes his selection placed in the hands of every schoolmaster to be industriously read and copied by their scholars as a model of style.\* Modern Bohemian authors also admit that the style of this version remains unsurpassed by any writer of their language.

The Testament was republished, in a duodecimo volume, in 1596, and again, revised by Bishop Ariston, in quarto, in 1601.†

A second edition of the Bible was printed in the year 1596. A copy of this is in the hands of the writer. It is an octavo volume of 1140 pages, with double columns, the numbers of the verses occupying a space between them, and marginal notes their exterior border. The type is small but clear. The original division into six parts is retained, and each is furnished with an engraved title enclosed in an arabesque border, and floriated ornamental initial letters; the initials of the books and chapters are of the same character, but smaller. Over the title of the first division is seen a lamb bearing a banner, the device on the seal of the Unity. The general title of the volume is surmounted by the Sacred name in Hebrew characters, under which on one side of an oval containing the title, is a representation of Moses with the tables of the Law; and on the other side, a figure bearing a cross with a banner and representing the Gospel. Underneath these appears a triumphal procession with the Lord of Glory in a chariot drawn by lambs, behind which Death and Hell are dragged as captives.

A copy of this Bible was recently offered in a French catalogue for 300 francs, and one of the first edition by a German bookseller for 150 thalers.

The third and last edition of the Bible published by the Brethren before their pitiless persecution and exile by the Emperor Ferdinand the Second, was a revision printed in a folio of 1177 pages in 1613. In neither this nor the second edition is the place of publication indicated; but both are believed to have been printed at Kralitz.‡

Notwithstanding a literary activity which subsequent Bohemian writers have regarded as marvellous,§ not only the Bibles of

\* Kleich, quoted by Elsner, in *Versuch*, pages 36 and 37.

† Elsner, *Versuch*, page 45. And Rieger, *Böhm. Br. 3ter. Theil*, page 470.

‡ Elsner, page 55.

§ Gindely, *Gesch. der B. Br. 1ter Bd.* page 124, and *2ter Bd.* page 71.



the Brethren but all their devotional books are now very scarce. This is principally owing to the blind zeal of the early Jesuits who ruthlessly burned all they could discover. Antonius Koniasch alone is said by his biographer, Pelzel,\* (himself a Jesuit) to have thus destroyed more than sixty thousand volumes.†

The revered Comenius, to supply in some measure the wants of his fellow-exiles who were destitute of Bibles, prepared and printed at Amsterdam in 1658, only two years after the destruction of his library at Lissa, a summary or abridgment of the Scriptures, entitled "A Handbook of the Marrow of the whole Holy Bible; the sum of what God has revealed for man to believe; commanded him to do; and taught him to expect," etc. It formed a 12mo pocket volume of 896 pages.‡

Since the year 1613 the Brethren's Bible has never been republished in Bohemia. In 1722, after the lapse of 109 years, a handsome reprint of the 3d edition was published for the use of exiles and their children at Halle in Saxony, and an edition of many thousand copies soon disposed of. §Encouraged by this success a bookseller of Brieg in Silesia undertook its republication in 1745, but his work was so poorly executed that none but the poorest people would purchase it.|| The Bohemians were always noted for their love of handsomely printed books and even sumptuous bindings.

The New Testament was reprinted at Halle in 1709, 1722, 1752, and 1764, at Zittau in 1720, Lauban 1730, Brieg 1744, and Berlin in 1752.

A splendid edition of the Bohemian translation from the Vulgate

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\* Pelzel, Franz Martin, *Böhmische, Mährische und Schlesische Gelehrte und Schriftsteller aus dem Order der Jesuiten*, page 184.

† The "Index Bohemicorum Librorum Prohibitorum" was issued from the press of the Jesuits at Prague, but bears no date. The sanction of the Pope is dated 1766, that of the Archbishop of Prague 1767, and the Imperial confirmation 1770. One might have expected more liberality, or at least some relaxation of vigilance, at so late a day as the time of Clement XIII, but none appears. In the "Index" every edition of the Brethren's Bible, together with its reprints, and the abridgement of Comenius, is not only prohibited but expressly marked for destruction with an asterisk, which is thus explained: "*\* notat Librum utpoti hæresi, vel aliis pravis dogmatis refertum, plene abolendum esse.*"

‡ Elsner, page 60.

§ Elsner, page 63.

|| Elsner, pages 69 and 70.

was published in Prague by Sam. Adam Weleslawina in 1613. This edition had 158 historical engravings in addition to numerous illustrations. Among those calculated to shock a Protestant mind are six representations of the Deity, preceding the six days' work of creation, attired in a blue coat and red mantle.\* Another edition of the Roman Catholic version, begun in 1677, was only completed at Prague in 1715, in a large folio; indicating a very small demand and no intention of supplying the common people.†

Having now carefully reviewed the history of the Bohemian Bible, it only remains to examine its claim to European priority.

Historians of the Bohemian Brethren, Cranz, Holmes, and Bost especially, have stated that the Brethren were the first who printed the Bible in a modern European language. In making this claim for the Brethren these authors rely exclusively on the 69th paragraph of the "*Historiola Ecclesiæ Bohemicæ*" of Comenius, prefixed to the "*Ratio Disciplinæ*," Amstel. 1660. viz:

"Crebrescere interim cæpit inventa nuper in Germania Typographiæ ars, prodeuntibus variis (in Italia potissimum, Romæ & Venetiis) libellis & libris, sacris & profanis. Bohemi ergo tanto hoc Dei dono animarum potissimum salutem utendum rati, Bibliorum vernaculo Idiomate circa hoc tempus editionem (primi Europæorum iterum) procuraverunt, *Venitiis*: brevique post, distractis exemplaribus, *Noribergæ*, semel & iterum: demum domi erectis officinis (Pragæ, Boleslaviæ, Kralicii in Moravia) sæpius."

The historians above named appear to have erred in supposing that when Comenius said "*Bohemi*," he meant the Brethren. In other respects they have fairly followed him, except as regards the date of this Venetian Bible. Comenius we see assigns no date, and Cranz simply repeats him. Holmes, however, thinking, probably, of the general spread of the art of printing referred to by Comenius gives 1470 as the year in which this Bible was printed,‡ while Bost, glancing at the dates of events recorded in the adjoining paragraphs and finding 1486 precede, and 1511 follow the paragraph we have transcribed, as an average or com-

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\* Elsner, pages 30 and 33.

† Kleich, quoted by Elsner, v. page 35.

‡ Holmes, History of Church of the Brethren. Vol. 1, page 63.

promise, fixes on the year 1490.\* We have seen that neither of these dates is correct, but that the Bible in question was printed in 1506.

Having already proved that the earliest Bohemian printed Bible, of which there is any record, was printed in 1488, we have only further to inquire whether any other European Bible preceded it. In doing this we take for our guide the "Nachricht von der hochteutschen Bibelübersetzung" of Professor Nast (Stuttgart, 1799,) consulting also the works of Panzer† and Goeze‡ on this subject.

According to Prof. Nast the early editions of the German Bible were printed in the following order, viz.:

1st. The oldest German Bible; printed by Fust and Schoiffer at Mayence, in the year 1462.

2nd. The Bible printed at Strasburg by John Mentel, 1466.

3rd. A Bible, origin unknown, probably printed between the years 1466 and 1470.

4th. A Bible, without a date, name of place or printer, in a Swiss dialect of the German, probably printed at Zurich, 1470 to 1473.

5th. The great Bible of Augsburg, without name of printer or date, but believed to have been published between the years 1472 and 1476.

As these five editions were printed without dates, these have only been arrived at from the written memoranda made by their rubricists (persons employed to trace and fill in ornamental initials and other capitals, with the pen or pencil) and the internal evidence afforded by the orthography, typography, etc., of the volumes themselves. Copies of all these editions are preserved in several of the great German libraries. They have been minutely examined and carefully described by the eminent bibliographers above named, who mainly agree in their conclusions, except in regard to the date of the first edition, which Panzer thinks could not have been printed in 1462, inasmuch as Fust and Schoiffer printed

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\* Bost, *Historie de l'Eglise des Freres de Boheme*, etc., Geneve, 1831. Tome 1. page 95.

† Panzer, *Nachricht von den allerältesten gedruckten deutschen Bibeln*. Nürnberg, 1778.

‡ Goeze, *Seltener und merkwürdiger Bibeln*, Halle, 1777.

a folio Latin Bible in that year, and he thinks their means would have proved unequal to the production of two such works in the same year. Watt, in *Bib. Britt. Edinb.* 1824, thinks it well ascertained that this Bible was printed in 1467, which is the latest date that any one has assigned to it. The language of this Bible is very old German, and the version is supposed to have been made about the year 1300.

The sixth German Bible, the first with a printed date, was published at Augsburg in 1477. Others followed, at Augsburg in 1477, and again in 1480, and in 1487; Nuremberg, 1483; Strasburg, 1485; one at Cologne, in the dialect of Lower Saxony, 1480; and one at Delft, in the Dutch language, in 1477.

We thus see that no less than thirteen European Bibles were extant before the first Bohemian one was printed. It is also obvious that to the illustrious nation to which we owe the typographic art, belongs the honor of having first printed the Scriptures in a modern language.

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NOTE.—Since the preceding went to the printer I have noticed that Bishop Cröger doubts whether Comenius really intended to convey the meaning generally attached to his words in the paragraph quoted on page 151, of which the English equivalent appears to be, “again the first of the Europeans,” and which in the rather free German translation of Enderes (*Schwabach*, 1739), reads “worinnen sie unter allen Europäischen Völkern abermahls die Ersten waren.”

In a foot-note, page 121 of the first part of his “*Geschichte der alten Brüderkirche*,” Bishop Cröger says, “Inwiefern Comenius meinte dass die Böhmen in diesem Stück allen anderen Nationen vorgegangen sind, ist nicht klar (*primi Europæorum iterum*).” I confess, however, that I fail to see the force of this suggestion, especially when I read these words of Comenius in the light of a passage in the 14th paragraph of the *Historiola*, in which, writing of the early Slavonian translation ascribed to St. Jerome, he says, “*Eôque inter Europæas gentes primi fuerunt Sclavi, quibus nativâ linguâ credita fuerunt eloquia Dei*,” which may be fairly rendered, “Thus the Slavonians were the first European people to whom the word of God was confided in their mother tongue,” and is clearly the antecedent to which the *iterum* (again) has reference.

W. G. M.